

Death Valley Ranch Guesthouse (Hacienda)
Death Valley National Monument
Inyo County
California

HABS No. CA-2257 B

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PHOTOGRAPHS

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

DEATH VALLEY RANCH GUEST HOUSE
(Scotty's Castle, Hacienda)

HABS No. CA-2257 B

Location: National Park Service Route 5 (commonly known as the North Highway), 25 miles west of the junction of US Route 95 with Nevada State Route 267 (commonly known as Scotty's Junction), Death Valley National Monument, Inyo County, California.

Present Owner: National Park Service.

Present Use: Two Residential Apartments on the Upper Story and a "Multi-Purpose Facility" that serves as a recreation, meeting, and first aid area on the ground level.

Significance: Construction of the Guest House began in October 1927. Work continued intermittently through 1931 when all construction at Death Valley Ranch was suddenly halted, leaving some sections, particularly in the basement, unfinished. Its brown and beige stucco exterior, red clay tile roof and highly decorative use of hand-forged metal, "antiqued" wood and colored tile make this structure an integral part of the Death Valley Ranch complex.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Note: For general information on the Death Valley Ranch complex, see HABS No. CA-2257.

A. Physical History:

1. Date of Erection: 1927-31.

October 1927 - Excavation began.¹
December 1927 - Concrete footings were poured.²
January 1928 - Basement walls were poured.³
February 1928 - Basement slab roof was poured.⁴
March 1928 - Wood frame for the upper story is being erected.⁵
April 1928 - Insulex is being poured in the walls of the end porches.⁶
July 1928 - Carpenters are working on the wood trim.⁷
August 1928 - Interior tile is being set.⁸
October 1928 - Exterior stucco finish is being applied.⁹
November 1928 - Interior floor tile is being set and the wiring is being pulled.¹⁰
January 1929 - The tile on the porch is being laid.¹¹
February 1929 - Exterior stairway in rear has been poured. Sewer connection is completed. Concrete poured for stairway to southwest corner of the basement.¹²

March 1929 - MacNeilledge lays out the lines for "the wall along the north edge of the road in front of the Guest House . . ."¹³ Plumbers are putting in water and gas pipes in the basement. Most of the electric light fixtures are installed.¹⁴ The new retaining wall west of the driveway is poured.¹⁵

May 1929 - East portion of concrete walls driveway have been poured. Walls in front of Guest House have being plastered and coped with tile.¹⁶

June 1929 - The tile of the porch has all been laid.¹⁷

January 1930 - Some interior tiling and plastering details are finished up.¹⁸

May 1930 - Plans by MacNeilledge for "Aztec Lounge" are completed and received at the Ranch.¹⁹

July 1930 - New electrical plans are completed.²⁰

2. Architect: Charles Alexander MacNeilledge.

3. Original and Subsequent Owners:

Albert Mussey Johnson (1927-1948)
Gospel Foundation (1948-1970)
National Park Service (1970-Present)

4. Builders, Suppliers:

General Superintendent: M. Roy Thompson

Building Superintendent: H.B. Brown (1926-1930)
C.G. Johnson (1930-1931)

Electric light fixtures: Julius Dietzmann's Forged Ironworks, Los Angeles, California.

Decorative tiles in bathroom and along fireplace: The Spanish Pottery, Los Angeles, California.

Iron Grilles over basement windows: Western Metalcraft Co., Los Angeles, California.²¹

5. Original plans and construction: Originally the upper story housed visitors and guests of the Johnsons and Scotty to the Ranch. It had two separate but identical east and west apartments with a shared central kitchen located on the north side.

Although never completed, the basement was to be divided into two separate halves with the east half devoted to coal storage and automobile garage and the west half to be an "Aztec-styled" lounge area. A letter from M. Roy Thompson to Albert Johnson says, "Mr. MacNeilledge has since indicated that this half of the basement is to be finished as a sort of Aztec lounging room."²² Only the

walls and the ceiling of the two rooms furthest to the west and a bathroom were plastered and completely finished. The remainder of the walls have only a rough stucco finish. The rest of the ceiling has a layer of exposed metal lath.

6. Alterations and additions: While the Gospel Foundation owned the Ranch, they rented out rooms at the Guest House to paying visitors. The Foundation probably adapted the fireplaces to accommodate gas heaters. The Foundation used the kitchen as a bathroom. The NPS reopened the door between the kitchen and the east apartment, refitting the kitchen, and closed off the door between the kitchen and the west apartment.²³

In 1976 the National Park Service modernized the east half of the basement into a "Multi-Purpose Facility." This now includes recreational, cooking, meeting and first aid facilities.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: All the decorative elements established in the extensive remodeling of the Main House are echoed in the Guest House and make it an integral part of the Death Valley Ranch complex. The elaborate design and detail invested in the elaborate electric light fixtures, hand-forged metal hardware, brightly colored ceramic tiles and carved wood trim along the porch and elsewhere demonstrate the fine craftsmanship of those involved in its construction.
2. Condition of Fabric: Good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: 90' x 19' plus the porch.
2. Foundations: Concrete.
3. Wall construction, finish, color: The basement is made entirely of concrete. The upper story is wood-frame construction. All exterior walls are finished with a brown and beige stucco to imitate a "weathered adobe."
4. Structural system, framing: The basement ceiling is a concrete slab supported by concrete beams. The upper story is wood stud frame construction.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors:

All doors are made of "antiqued" wood. Almost all the doors have redwood lintels.

End Porch Doors: The upper half of each of these doors has a row of decoratively turned spindles. The lower sections have carved cross braces and decorative metal studs as reinforcements. The lintels over each of these doors have a hand-painted floral pattern.

Each apartment has a pair of entries that open out onto the full length porch on the south facade; one from the bedroom and one from the living room. All of these are practically identical. They are constructed of tongue-and-groove wood slabs that are fastened together by ornate hand-forged metal strap hinges.

The garage has a four-leaf accordion door fastened together with hand-forged metal strap hinges.

b. Windows: Most of the windows have metal sashes. Those of the raised basement have six large lights and have iron grilles over them. The windows of the upper story, except for the clerestory, have redwood lintels and shutters. Most of these have a pair of eight lights and metal sashes. The clerestory has round wood-sash windows with iron grilles over them.

6. Chimneys: One large chimney at the center of the south facade and two smaller chimneys at either ends, east and west. All three have clay chimney pots.

7. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: Multi-plane shed roof covered with red clay tiles.

b. Cornice, eaves: Decoratively carved rafter ends.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: See measured drawings.

2. Flooring:

Basement - Most of the west half of the basement retains its original concrete floor scored in such a fashion to simulate a tile floor. Only the bathroom has a tile floor. The east half now has a rug and linoleum floor.

Upper Story - All of the porch has red-tile flooring. In each of the living rooms there are two different patterns that interlace. The bathrooms have tiles with colored imprints and the bedrooms have red tiles of two different sizes. The kitchen has a red tile floor. All the interior rooms have a row of colored tiles along the base of the outside walls.

3. Wall and Ceiling Finish:

Basement - The two westernmost rooms of the basement have been finished. The rest of the west half of the basement has been left rough and incomplete. The ceilings of the two completed rooms have been rounded to simulate Gothic vault and rib construction. The remainder of the ceiling has metal lath in place to replicate this design, but was left exposed. Although coming apart in places, it is probably just as it was left in 1931 when all construction ceased.

The east half of the basement has painted concrete walls. Some wood-frame walls have been added in order to screen the kitchen area. A dropped acoustic ceiling with recessed lighting has been introduced.

Upper Story - Most of the walls of the apartments have been plastered. The lower half of the bathroom walls has been covered with brightly colored tiles. The living room ceilings are open and the exposed trusses have been darkly stained.

4. Doorways and doors: All the doors are made of "antiqued" wood slabs and are fastened with hand-forged metal strap hinges. The doorway between the living room and the bathroom has a round arch.

5. Decorative Features: The large living room windows facing north have lintels that display hand-painted multi-colored floral patterns. These designs are similar to those of the lintels over the doors of the end porches.

The interior light fixtures and door hardware are hand made and have animal images as their theme. The most elaborate is the bathroom door handle in the shape of a winged horse.

The wood carving of the porch balustrade has particularly fanciful cut-out shapes.

- D. Site: The Guest House is situated on a south-facing hillside just north of and parallel to the main east-west axis for the Ranch and is halfway between the Main House and the Barn.

Historic Landscaping: The area between the Guest House and the retaining wall that follows the road has been landscaped with randomly-placed rocks and boulders and a variety of desert flora that include Joshua and Palm trees and some locally found cacti and plants. A path paved with flagstone leads from a gateway entrance at the southwest corner of the garden to the east entrance of the Guest House. An elaborate electric light fixture hangs over the entrance gate.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Scotty's Castle Recording Project at Death Valley National Monument, California, was undertaken during the summers 1987-89 by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) division of the National Park Service, and co-sponsored by the Western Regional Office of the National Park Service. Principals involved were Robert J. Kapsch, Chief of HABS/HAER; Kenneth L. Anderson, AIA, Chief of HABS and project leader in 1987 and 1988; and Paul D. Dolinsky, Principal Architect of HABS and project leader in 1989.

The recording teams were supervised in the field by Marlys B. Thurber in 1987, John White in 1988, and Joseph D. Balachowski in 1989. The written documentation was prepared by Richard A. Bernstein of Cornell University in 1987.

PART IV. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The repository of nearly all of the sources of information is the Reference Library and Preservation Office, Scotty's Castle, Death Valley National Monument, California. Individual references take the form of endnotes, as follows:

1. Letter from M. Roy Thompson to Albert M. Johnson, dated October 17, 1927. Outgoing correspondence, manuscript 7, box 5.
2. Letter from M. Roy Thompson to Albert M. Johnson dated December 20, 1927. Outgoing correspondence, manuscript 7, box 5.
3. Letter from M. Roy Thompson to Albert M. Johnson dated January 29, 1928. Outgoing correspondence, manuscript 7, box 6.
4. Letter from M. Roy Thompson to Albert M. Johnson dated February 19, 1928. Outgoing correspondence, manuscript 7, box 6.

5. Letter from M. Roy Thompson to Albert M. Johnson dated March 11, 1928. Outgoing correspondence, manuscript 7, box 6.
6. Letter from M. Roy Thompson to Albert M. Johnson dated April 5, 1928. Outgoing correspondence, manuscript 7, box 6.
7. Letter from M. Roy Thompson to Albert M. Johnson dated July 7, 1928. Outgoing correspondence, manuscript 7, box 6.
8. Letters from M. Roy Thompson to Albert m. Johnson dated August 14 and August 28, 1928. Outgoing correspondence, manuscript 7, box 6.
9. Letter from M. Roy Thompson to Albert M. Johnson dated October 27, 1928. Outgoing correspondence, manuscript 7, box 7.
10. Letter from M. Roy Thompson to Albert M. Johnson dated November 7, 1928. Outgoing correspondence, manuscript 7, box 7.
11. Letter from M. Roy Thompson to Albert M. Johnson dated January 20, 1929. Outgoing correspondence, manuscript 7, box 7.
12. Letters from M. Roy Thompson to Albert M. Johnson dated February 3, February 15, February 19, February 26 and February 28, 1929. Outgoing correspondence, manuscript 7, box 7.
13. Letter from M. Roy Thompson to Albert M. Johnson dated March 3, 1929. Outgoing correspondence, manuscript 7, box 7.
14. Letters from M. Roy Thompson to Albert M. Johnson dated March 10, March 24 and March 25, 1929. Outgoing correspondence, manuscript 7, box 7.
15. Letter from M. Roy Thompson to Albert M. Johnson dated March 28, 1929. Outgoing correspondence, manuscript 7, box 8.
16. Letters from M. Roy Thompson to Albert M. Johnson dated May, 11 and May 31, 1929. Outgoing correspondence, manuscript 7, box 8.
17. Letter from M. Roy Thompson to Albert M. Johnson dated June 6, 1929. Outgoing correspondence, manuscript 7, box 8.
18. Letter from M. Roy Thompson to Albert M. Johnson dated January 11, 1930. Outgoing correspondence, manuscript 7, box 10. Letters from Charles Alexander MacNeilledge to M. Roy Thompson dated January 23 and 28, 1930. Incoming correspondence, manuscript 7, box 20.
19. Letter from M. Roy Thompson to Charles Alexander MacNeilledge dated May 27, 1930. Outgoing correspondence, manuscript 7, box 11.
20. See architectural drawings, catalogue nos. 21278 and 21279. A copy of a plan of the main floor is attached to this report.

21. Letter from M. Roy Thompson to Charles Alexander MacNeilledge dated February 28, 1928. Outgoing correspondence, manuscript 7, box 6.

22. Letter from M. Roy Thompson to Albert Mussey Johnson, dated March 10, 1929. Outgoing correspondence, manuscript 7, box 7. Some undated sketches labeled "Study For Guest House Lounge Room" or words to that effect are in the architectural drawings collection. See architectural drawings, catalogue nos. 20563, 20564, 20565, 20566, 20592, and 20593. Two drawings labeled "Ceiling Construction And Fireplace For Lounge" are also in the collection. See architectural drawings, catalogue nos. 20709 and 20710.

23. Conversation with Don Creech, August, 1987.

ADDENDUM TO:
DEATH VALLEY RANCH, GUESTHOUSE (HACIENDA)
Death Valley National Park
Death Valley vicinity
Inyo County
California

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